

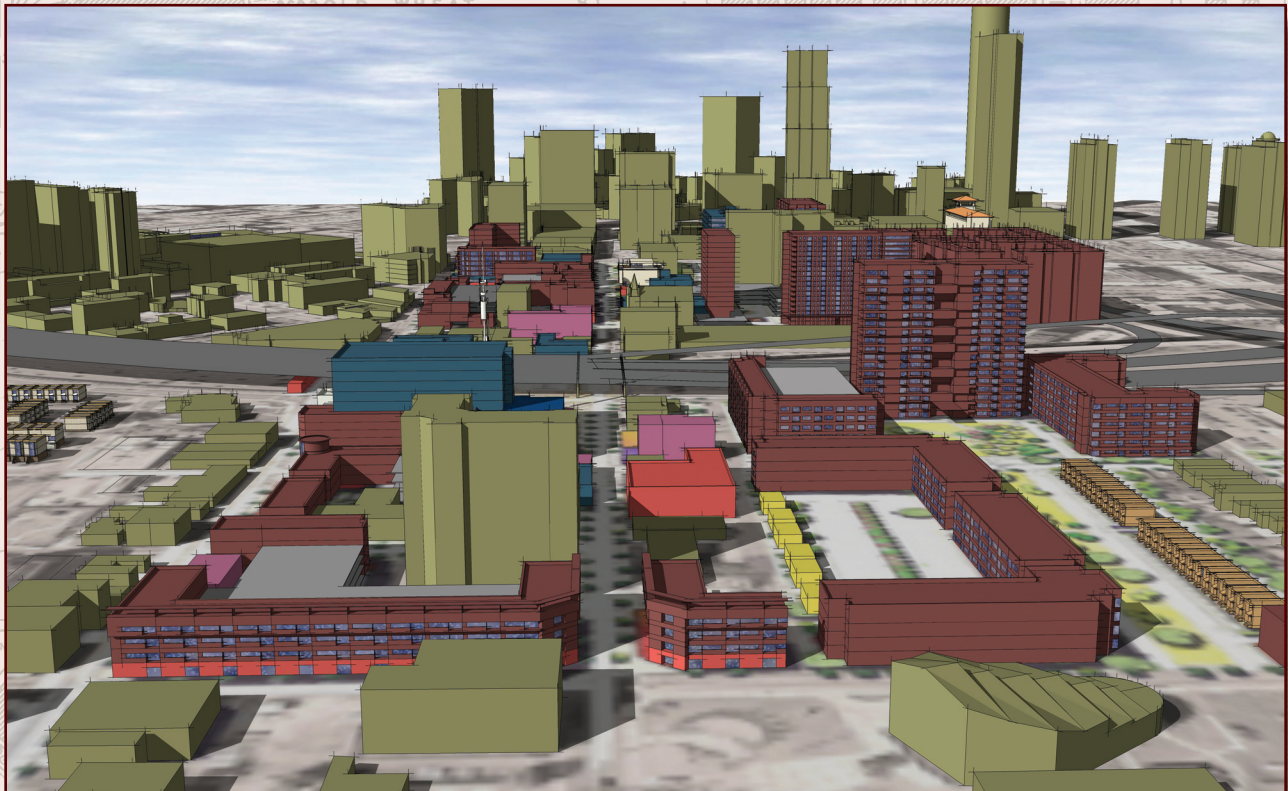


Butler - Auburn Redevelopment Plan Update

Part I : Plan Overview



New Development along Auburn Avenue, looking West



Part 1 Plan Overview

Before outlining specific redevelopment plan projects, regulatory changes, and implementation mechanisms, it is important to understand the context under which this redevelopment plan update was prepared. This plan seeks to build upon the previously adopted Community Redevelopment Plan (1994) by recognizing that a wide variety of local stakeholders, policy-makers and outside interested onlookers have worked tirelessly over the course of many generations in stewardship of the Sweet Auburn legacy. The previous plan (and the plans that it preceded) represented numerous hours of blood, sweat and tears of Sweet Auburn legends (past and present).

Rather than denying past successes and failures, this Part 1 attempts to place Sweet Auburn firmly within its physical and social context by: describing the surrounding physical context of the area; outlining the participatory process that was undertaken for this update; laying out the overall "themes" that helped drive the planning effort; describing the rich tapestry of other planning efforts in the area; and finally, by spelling out the specific vision, goals and objectives which every other aspect of this plan is designed to support.

Figure 1.0:
Rucker Building from
Piedmont Avenue



(Image: GSU Archives, Lane Brother / Tracy O'Neil Collections)

1.1 Study Area Context

For consistency, the Redevelopment Plan Update follows exactly the boundaries of the 1994 CRP shown in red in the diagram below. Its irregularity across Interstate 75/85 is reflective of both the limits of the MLK Landmark Zoning District and the need to include residential areas east of the interstate traditionally considered part of Sweet Auburn. This results in the eastern half being defined by Highland Avenue on the north, Boulevard on the east and the MARTA / CSX right-of-way on the south. It is adjacent to the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood on the east, although the MLK zoning district goes beyond Boulevard to include a significant portion of this neighborhood.

The study area backbone is Auburn Avenue, with the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site anchoring the east end. On the west, the study area stretches to Peachtree Street and Woodruff Park. Other major parks in or near the study area include Hurt Park, Butler Park, Freedom Park and Oakland Cemetery, as well as the gardens in the National Historic Site. Several large public / institutional land uses occupy or are adjacent to the southern half, such as Grady Hospital, Grady Homes, and Georgia State University. Other study area schools are John Hope Elementary and Walden Middle.

The National Historic Site is the primary tourist attraction, although the study area is also close to the Fairlie-Poplar district, Underground Atlanta, and the state capitol. The Downtown hotel district is also within walking distance of the study area's western half. MARTA rail transit connections are present at Piedmont and Decatur (Georgia State Station) and Hiliard and Decatur (King Memorial Station).

Figure 1.1:
Study Area Context



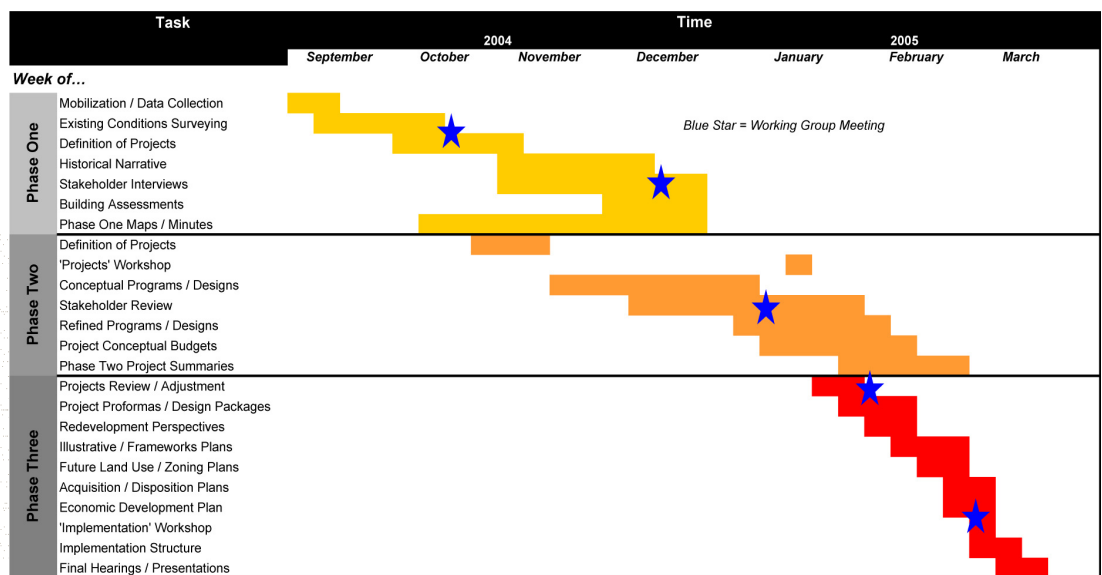
1.2 Redevelopment Plan Update Process

The plan update evolved over three phases and several months. A first phase of recording and analyzing existing conditions was supplemented by identification of the conceptual redevelopment projects and the key ownership interests for each. Interviews were then conducted with these individuals and groups, with at least one per redevelopment project, to gain insights as to future plans for the parcels. These interviews, though programmed for Phase One, continued for most of the project. Additional interviews added the perspectives of those stakeholders with more general interest in the corridor. Phase One also contained research on the historic urban framework.

Throughout the process a six-member steering committee or 'Working Group' was kept abreast of progress and solicited for guidance at key points, for example at the initial selection of the redevelopment projects. The centerpiece of community involvement was a workshop conducted on February 26 to discuss the pros and cons of each project, the storyline, and various public improvements and priorities. Over 50 people attended and were satisfied with the level of detailed discussion. The balance of Phase Two consisted of refining the projects and their economics in line with community input.

Phase Three consisted of the final drafting of the Plan Update, illustrative drawings, virtual models, and final economics. Phase Three also involved revising the text of the MLK Landmark Zoning District, and the necessary coordination meetings with the Bureau of Planning and the Atlanta Urban Design Commission.

Figure 1.2:
Redevelopment Plan
Update Process



1.3 Primary Themes

The Redevelopment Plan Update as a matter of policy must, and does, address the issues and strategies contained in the 1994 CRP. However, with several developments along Auburn either approved, in review, or on the boards, the focus naturally gravitated to three interwoven themes – re-conceiving catalytic projects, drafting zoning adjustments, and creating an overarching marketing or branding strategy. While it was admitted during the 2004 AUDC review of Sweet Auburn Village (a specific development project already in progress) that many aspects of the Landmark District zoning needed change, the merging of large, highly descriptive projects with branding was a result of considering the applicability of a 'master development' model – similar to other sweeping mixed-use public-private ventures like Fruitvale Village in Oakland, California and Stapleton in Denver, Colorado.

1.3.1 Marketing / Branding / Historic Narrative

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement are embedded in the American experience, and the King National Historic Site visitor's center receives upward of ten million tourists and pilgrims per year. The story of Sweet Auburn in conjunction with Dr. King's life is presented by the National Park Service, and a major new initiative to mark Sweet Auburn historic sites is underway. And yet, stakeholders have repeatedly said that the multifaceted story of Sweet Auburn is largely unknown – even to Atlanta natives – when in fact at one point in time Auburn Avenue was more celebrated than even New York's Harlem.

The waxing of cultural and heritage tourism in the United States coincides with an aging, more affluent, baby boom population and a sense of introspection since the tragedies of September 11, 2001. More people are seeking to reinforce feelings of a common past and affirm a cultural solidity, through visits to America's celebrated historic and natural parks and sites. The National Park Service has at least 38 heritage tourism itineraries online; the National Trust for Historic Preservation lists over 70 'Distinctive Destinations' in their marketing. Sweet Auburn is a natural for each – it has both the social pedigree and the stock of historic buildings to qualify it as one of the premier African-American and Civil Rights heritage sites in the country.

Figure 1.3:
Fruitvale Village
(www.fruitvalevillage.net)



FRUITVALE BART TRANSIT VILLAGE
Oakland, California

Fruitvale Development Corporatio
McLarand, Vasquez & Partners In



A portion of this redevelopment plan update will discuss the 'story' that binds Sweet Auburn together; posit strategies for 'branding' this story to increase its popular recognition; and describe preservation and public space improvements to make the story visible and coherent for visitors. Other African-American cultural tourism areas like the U Street Corridor / Shaw neighborhood in Washington D.C. can offer lessons in balancing preservation and growth, and demonstrate how marketing and branding can be used to sustain both.

1.3.2 Catalytic Redevelopment Projects

Part 2 in the 1994 Redevelopment Plan identified many sites in the Butler-Auburn study area for building preservation, building rehabilitation, and new construction. Likewise rough programs for housing, commercial / retail, office, institutional and entertainment uses, in both new construction and renovations, were outlined – and public improvements directed toward leveraging those programs discussed. Yet the 1994 plan did not describe in detail project attributes of massing, architectural character, or market-based pro-forma analytics. This Plan Update goes farther than the original plan in that it outlines specific site-based design strategies and provides detailed pro-forma financial analysis across thirteen unique redevelopment projects. This, in conjunction with the property owner interviews, place these catalytic projects within a realistic development perspective rather than an idealized 'hope' that may never materialize. These projects were chosen on the basis of several conditions:

- **Ownership** – most if not all projects are dominated by a single landowner, whose development program structured the approach to the project.
- **Land Utilization** – most projects contain substantial under-utilized or vacant parcels, including surface parking lots; some contain underutilized buildings.
- **Immediacy** – several projects have been either submitted for initial development approval or are in active stages of development planning or sale. Every attempt was made to identify these major opportunities and incorporate them in the process.
- **Historic Preservation** – almost all projects contain some quantity of existing buildings, many of which are historic resources that require preservation and rehabilitation.
- **Parking** – most projects represent opportunities to add significant new parking facilities to the study area.

Each of the thirteen projects will have a catalytic effect on surrounding properties in the sense that development will establish a precedent, build critical mass and give security to lenders and developers to take on additional – if smaller or more marginal – projects. As such, an important aspect of public investment, either in the form of TAD subsidies or infrastructure improvements, is focused on supporting these projects (discussed at length in Part VI and in the appendix).

1.3.3 Zoning Changes

Many aspects of the existing Landmark District zoning ordinance are outdated or would benefit from text modifications for clarity. SPI-1, the district covering the adjacent Downtown core, is being updated with quality-of-life standards that are equally applicable to the Landmark District but absent. And, other areas under conventional zoning could be considered for addition to the Landmark District or replacement by other, newer ordinances. These issues are discussed in Part V, with a draft of the Landmark District revisions in Appendix B.

1.4 Recent Additional Planning Efforts

The Redevelopment Plan Update represents an overall continuation and refinement of the issues and strategies contained in the 1994 CRP (as approved by City Council). In fact, the 1994 CRP itself represented an elaboration of many themes and planning efforts that preceded it. In this way, the past 30 years of Auburn Avenue have been a continuum of 'hope' and 'thought' for future progress, but has fallen short of significant 'action' - particularly in the arena of private reinvestment.

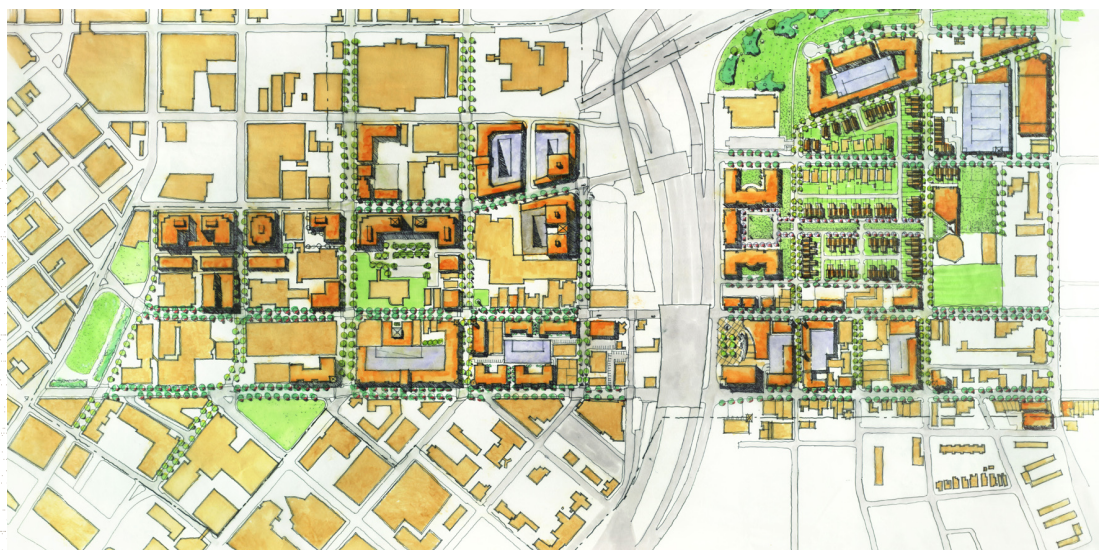
This CRP update planning process, along with other recent efforts, has attempted to move beyond ideas by bringing real-world development realities into focus. Three specific recent efforts point out Sweet Auburn's new model of 'development-oriented' planning.

Imagine Downtown - a Central Atlanta Progress (CAP) initiative to identify and plan for key, market-based, development opportunities in the Downtown area - included five target areas. The Auburn Avenue Target Area included an intensive month-long effort by area stakeholders to define the current development picture based on a detailed understanding of the downtown housing and commercial development market (market research conducted by ZVA/ZHA). The effort culminated in an interactive four-hour design workshop attended by over 60 participants.

Sweet Auburn Village is a private development project (Integral Properties & Big Bethel Church) covering nearly an entire block-face of Auburn Avenue between Butler Street and Piedmont Avenue. The effort involved a wide array of interests including the Atlanta Urban Design Commission. The ultimate development plan represents a new development approach for the avenue - one which brings new dense urban housing to the area while preserving the small scale historic buildings fronting the avenue. The process demonstrated that a refinement to the Landmark Zoning was necessary to financially support new development (i.e., allowing slightly higher densities) in a manner that allows for the preservation of existing historic structures to the greatest extent possible.

The Grady Homes Master Plan (in process) takes advantage the emerging intown housing market (as demonstrated in the Imagine Downtown effort) by fully redeveloping the public housing project into a new, sustainable mixed-income community. This project will serve to single-handedly upgrade the economics of the area by de-concentrating the poverty that exists there today.

Figure 1.4:
Imagine Downtown
Eastside-Auburn
Illustrative Plan





1.5 Plan Goals and Objectives

The 'Community Vision' and 'Goals and Objectives' stated below are taken largely from the 1994 CRP. Given that they were originally developed with significant community input, and remain highly salient, the Vision, Goals and Objectives as stated herein have only been slightly refined from their original form.

1.5.1 Overall Community Vision

The overall vision is of a dynamic, revitalized "Sweet Auburn" community, firmly rooted in the historical African-American experience while going forward into the 21st century with a competitive business and entertainment environment, growing cultural, religious, and social institutions, and an inviting intown living place for diverse economic and social groups. The key to the overall community's future strength is the generation of resurgent public and private investment to make Auburn Avenue a premier destination for tourism and trade, entertainment, and cultural exchange for all ethnic and national groups. This can be done by capitalizing on Sweet Auburn's historical association with the international civil rights movement, as well as creative approaches to the preservation and commemoration of historical facilities, events and leaders in many area of the African-American experience.

1.5.2 Goal #1: Urban Form and Design Enhancement

Reinforce the urban design features, artistic activity, and community institutions that have created the Butler Street/Auburn Avenue area, through the use of building preservation and adaptive re-use of historic structures and other types of commemorative actions. Encourage sensitively designed new construction that will enhance the historical qualities in the future and provide new economic and cultural development opportunities.

Objective #1: Articulate the history, or 'story' of prominent businesses, institutions, and individuals through the use of building restoration, preservation, adaptive re-use, and other forms of commemorative activity to leave physical reminders of their importance.

1.5.3 Goal #2: Arts, Culture, and History


Restore, commemorate, and interpret the varied artistic, cultural, and historical events, and the associated people and place that established and sustained Butler Street/Auburn Avenue through the years; and situate the community for increased artistic and cultural development in the future.

Objective #1: Identify, protect, and interpret the historical places and buildings in the context of community culture and history, as well as national culture and history.

Objective #2: Commemorate through permanent markings, plaques, and educational programs the events and people from Auburn Avenue's past.

Objective #3: Improve coordination and expand the activities of non-profit institutions and commercial entertainment businesses, especially in the performing and musical arts, to create a thriving African-American cultural and entertainment center, including new theaters, night clubs, restaurants, museums, etc.

Objective #4: Expand the public awareness and visibility of the visual and performing arts in many different ways, including public art projects, street performances and exhibitions, and formal galleries, exhibitions, and concerts.



Objective #5: Provide opportunities for studio and live/work space for artists or arts related professionals in the heart of the Butler Street/Auburn Avenue neighborhood.

1.5.4 Goal #3: Economic Development and Opportunity

Retain and revitalize existing businesses and create opportunities for new businesses, using the tourism, retail, and entertainment potentials of the area as the primary anchors for expanded entrepreneurial activity, economic opportunity, and additional jobs for neighborhood residents.

Objective #1: Support existing small businesses and generate new infill businesses in order to produce continuous retail activity on Auburn Avenue between the M.L. King, Jr. National Historic Site and the cultural, arts, and entertainment district.

Objective #2: Promote the Municipal Curb Market and Dobbs Plaza as anchors and catalysts for increased business development throughout the area.

Objective #3: Solidify the emerging cultural and entertainment district in the western part of Auburn Avenue through the restoration of prominent entertainment buildings, the creation of new entertainment oriented activities, and the expansion of hotel and other entertainment supporting functions.

Objective #4: Promote the re-use and revitalization of the Edgewood Avenue and Decatur Street commercial districts.

Objective #5: Assist small business investment and provide skill training/job opportunities in order to combat poverty and unemployment in the community.

1.5.5 Goal #4: Infrastructure and Public Facilities

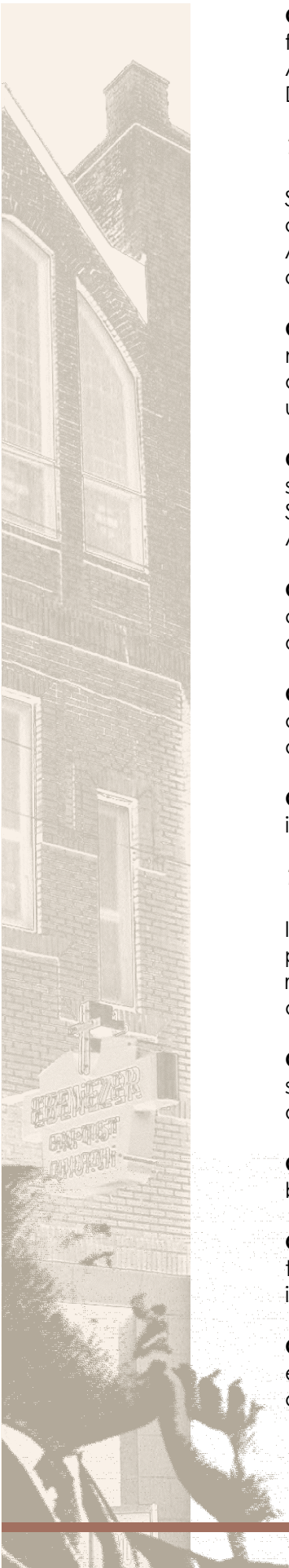
Use existing and proposed improvements to infrastructure, open space, and community facilities to increase the economic development potential of Butler/Auburn; and to enhance resident access to facilities, services, and outside economic, cultural, and social opportunities.

Objective #1: Provide a high quality pedestrian environment along Auburn Avenue and other pedestrian linkages to the M.L. King, Jr. MARTA station, the M.L. King, Jr. Center and Community Center, the Municipal Curb Market, Georgia State University, and other schools and recreational facilities.

Objective #2: Develop additional park and recreation space through the redevelopment of Grady Homes, renovations to Butler Park, increased access to existing Atlanta Board of Education property and facilities, and the integration of Freedom Park in the community.

Objective #3: Seek new private resources and contractual relationships between community-based organizations such as CDCs or social and human service organizations, and the City of Atlanta, Atlanta Board of Education, and the Atlanta Housing Authority, to empower the community to maintain and provide recreation programs supervision in public open spaces. Encourage better working relationships for community groups with City departments and other governmental agencies for the delivery of public services.

Objective #4: Develop expanded parking capacity to support mixed-use development along Auburn and Edgewood Avenues; and create a parking finance and management strategy that will promote shared parking facilities for expanded visitor activities based on a pedestrian-friendly district and improved public shuttle/streetcar service.



Objective #5: Improve traffic, public transportation and site development access, focusing pedestrian bus service and shuttle/streetcar services primarily on Auburn Avenue, with other vehicular traffic and bus service on Edgewood Avenue, John W. Dobbs Avenue, Irwin Street, and Boulevard.

1.5.6 Goal #5: Housing Improvements

Strengthen the socio-economic diversity, home ownership patterns, unit design choices and affordability of existing and new housing in the Butler Street/Auburn Avenue community through historic preservation, housing rehabilitation, infill housing construction, financial assistance, and management improvements.

Objective #1: Where appropriate, rehabilitate existing housing units through the use of moderate and substantial repair and financing assistance programs and redevelop tax delinquent, unoccupied or renter-occupied property for conversion to owner-occupied units.

Objective #2: Support the construction of new housing units on vacant/under-utilized sites, including multi-family housing to meet campus-related housing needs of Georgia State University, Grady Hospital, and others desiring to live in the unique ambiance of Auburn Avenue.

Objective #3: Redevelop the Grady Homes and Graves Tower & Annex public housing communities as a new mixed-income neighborhood with housing options for renters, owners and seniors.

Objective #4: Promote and allow the development of housing in the upper floors of appropriate commercial structures along Auburn and Edgewood Avenues to create a 24-hour mixed use environment.

Objective #5: Maintain the existing and newly constructed housing stock through increased code enforcement, maintenance and rehabilitation assistance programs.

1.5.7 Goal #6: Social, Human, and Community Services

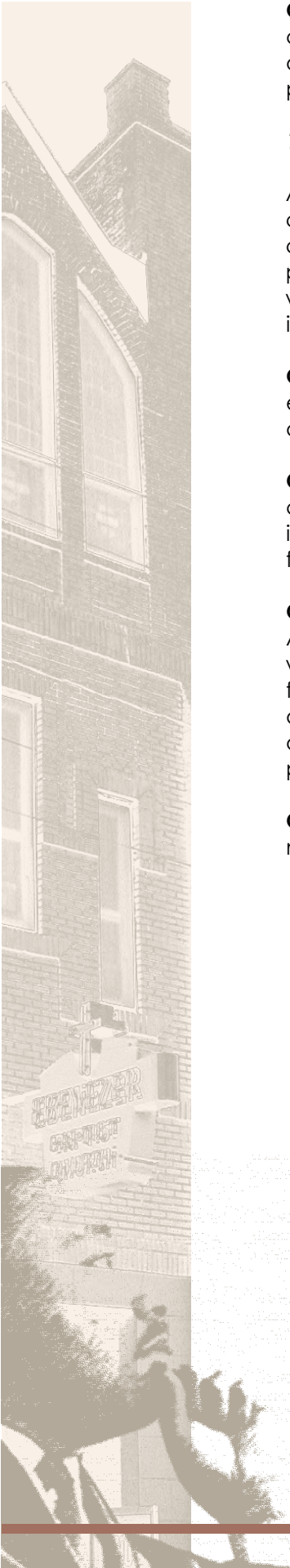
Improve the processes of needs determination and the coordination of public and privately-sponsored delivery of social, human, and community services to those residents who can benefit the most, using increased communication, cooperation, and coordination as guiding principles.

Objective #1: Improve neighborhood security and public safety through 24-hour staffing of the mini-precinct, increased neighborhood watch programs, and initiation of new crime prevention programs for the area's elderly residents.

Objective #2: Expand effective social service provision through better coordination between City, County, and State activities.

Objective #3: Increase educational, cultural, and recreational opportunities through the expansion of locally directed programs taking advantage of leadership from institutions based within and near Butler Street/Auburn Avenue.

Objective #4: Increase the effectiveness of the existing religiously-based social and economic services through better cooperation and communication between churches and church outreach groups.



Objective #5: Improve area health care provision through increased community coordination, additional home care programs for the elderly, creation of a directory of health and social services, and increased transportation services to health care providers.

1.5.8 Goal #7: Responsibility and Partnership

Accept the challenge of strengthening the Butler Street/Auburn Avenue residential, cultural, public service, and economic systems by drawing on the cooperation, commitment, leadership, and resources that have sustained the community in the past, thus leading to more effective organization and partnership relationships in which members of the community can be empowered to carry out many revitalization initiatives independently.

Objective #1: Implement innovative redevelopment strategies and processes to engage community-based organization, property owners, and businesses in the acquisition and improvement of properties and facilities.

Objective #2: Strengthen the development roles and capacities of non-profit community development corporations (CDC's) for promotion of private and public improvements and for delivering affordable housing, small business and jobs benefits for the community.

Objective #3: Establish a permanent Butler Street/Auburn Avenue Community Advocacy Board with NPU "M" and neighborhood interest group representatives, to work closely with ADA, City of Atlanta, CAP and other public and private agencies for the preparation, review and approval of public and private development plans affecting the community. Establish a 'director/project manager' who works full time on the implementation of this and other plans, but is someone who does not have a personal financial or political stake in the Auburn Avenue community.

Objective #4: Identify new private and public resources to enable community-based management of improved community services.